

Public Universities Fees Hike in Nigeria: Reasons, Social Implications and Suggestions for Decision Making for Effective University Administration in Nigeria

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Abstract: The paper discussed the social implications of fees hike in public universities in Nigeria. Secondary data were used in the paper. The data were collected from both print and online publications. The paper submitted that stakeholders in tertiary education especially the universities have made their position known on the fee hike in Nigerian universities. Stakeholders like the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) and the Academic Staff Union of Nigerians Universities have opposed the idea of university fees hike and advised the government not to increase the fees in the various universities. Also, the paper in the areas of reasons given by universities in Nigeria for the fees increment identified; increment in cost of administration, low subvention from the government and poor internally generated revenue. On the social implications of fee hikes in Nigeria, the paper identified a likely reduction in university enrolment, retention and graduate output, an increment in the prostitution rate among female students, an increment in criminal activities, insecurity problems and poor human capital development. The paper concluded that the suggestions of the government on fees increment to enable public universities to generate more revenue and to be able to contribute to the internal management of the various universities is a welcome idea. But increment in the fees of various universities with the present economic challenges of inflation and high poverty rate and without any social programme designed or put in place to reduce the impacts of fees hike on the students and parents is not the best decision. Based on this, the paper hereby recommended that the federal and state government should launch a bursary and scholarship programme for students in tertiary institutions across the country. Private institutions and religious organizations should be encouraged to commence scholarship programmes for students. Fees increment in any university should be agreed upon by the stakeholders in various universities before implementation. The government should implement 15-20% budget allocation to education of as recommended by UNESCO.

Keywords: Administration, Implication, Public Universities, School fees Hike.

Introduction

Education is an instrument for affecting national development. Education can be defined as the production and reproduction of knowledge of people's way of life (i.e. their culture) to preserve and maintain the social structure that will be able to guarantee social order and changes in society (NOUN, 2012).

From a global perspective, economic and social developments are increasingly driving the advancement and application of knowledge. Education in general and higher education in particular, are fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and society in all nations. The nation looks up to higher education through its traditional functions of teaching, research and community service to develop manpower and disseminate necessary knowledge that is needed in industry and other sectors. Higher education is a community of scholars, free to pursue knowledge without undue interference from anywhere. Nigeria's higher education system is comprised of universities, polytechnics, and colleges offering programmes in teacher education and agriculture (NOUN, 2012).

The University system in Nigeria is made up of federal, state and private universities. The public is made up of federal and state universities. Ogunode (2020) opined that public universities are universities owned by the government. Public universities are universities established to provide post-secondary schools for Nigerians. Public universities are universities established by an act of parliament to serve the interest of the general public. Public universities deal with the provision of teaching, research and community services. The objectives of the universities in Nigerian Higher education, including professional education have the following aims: the acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and societies; the development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate environment; the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community; the acquisition of an overview of the local and external environments (FGN, 2013). Public universities in Nigeria are grouped into federal and state-owned universities. The federal universities are owned by the federal government of Nigeria while the state universities are owned by the state government. The total number of federal and state public universities is 49 and 59 across the country (NUC, 2022).

Recently, the government made it clear cannot continue to fund higher education alone and there is a need for the various higher institutions in Nigeria to look for various means to increase their revenue generation. Osinbajo (2022) observed that funding in the university system (public universities) has to be diversified. The system has to find a way to sustain itself. This can be done through the establishment of an endowment fund. Raising money through independent sources for funding university education will help to provide more funds for the development of Nigerian universities. Tuition fees increment has been accepted by the administrators and managers of Nigerian universities as some of the means to increase their internally generated revenue. With this development, a good number of public varsities in Nigeria have resorted to increasing school fees and other charges as a means to generate more revenues to run varsities in Nigeria. Based on this background, this paper is aimed to discuss the implications of fees hike in public universities in Nigeria.

Current analysis of Fee Hikes in Nigerian Public Universities

Punch (2023b) reported that during the strike, a former Minister of State for Education, Chukwuemeka Nwajiuba, had in an interview with their correspondent talked about the plan for sustainable funding of the universities, including fee hike, but ASUU kicked against the proposal. The first time ASUU kicked against the proposal of a tuition hike was during the negotiation for the 2018 strike when the chief negotiator, who represented the Federal Government, Wale Babalakin, was said to have proposed that school fees be increased to ensure sustainability in the university system, but ASUU had called for the removal of Babalakin from the negotiation panel.

Findings by Punch (2023b) revealed that some universities announced over 200 per cent hike and also proposed the idea of instalment payment so as not to strain parents who might be finding it tough paying at once. For instance, the Federal University, Dutse, has announced a 200 per cent increase in tuition fees but also disclosed discounts for the children of its workers. At the University of Maiduguri located in the Northeast geo-political zone of Nigeria, findings showed that the management of the institution explained that it hiked associated fees due to

rising inflation in the country. The memo, which was titled, 'Upward review of registration fees', was released by the office of the registrar of the institution.

At the Federal University, Lafia, Nasarawa State, findings revealed that the university had increased registration fees by students to as high as N150, 000 for some programmes. This was disclosed in a schedule of payment obtained by our correspondent. Also, Data from the website of the University of Uyo, a prominent federal university located in Akwa Ibom State, revealed that both new and returning students would pay over N100, 000 as against the N50,000 currently paid by students in the institution.

The findings also indicated that, at the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, the institution noted it revised charges payable by students due to the escalating cost of providing services. SaharaReporters (2022) also stated that the University of Nigeria Nsukka, Enugu State increased tuition fees by 100% while hostel fees were increased by 50%. Although students are protesting against the school fees hike. Also, the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, and the Federal University of Health Sciences, Azare, Bauchi State, has already announced up to 100% hikes in fees since the suspension of the eight-month-long strike by the Academic Staff Union of Universities. The National Open University of Nigeria has also increased the school fees. Nairaland (2023) reported that presently about thirty-eight (38) higher institutions and Universities have increased their school fees in Nigeria.

Positions of Stakeholders on Fees Increment in Nigerian Public Universities

Stakeholders in tertiary education especially the universities have made their position known regarding the fee hike in Nigerian universities. Stakeholders like the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) and the Academic Staff Union of Nigerians Universities have advised the government not to increase the fees in the various universities. For instance, the Sahara reporters (2023) reported that the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) has rejected the outrageous hikes in school fees by most federal universities for both new and returning students. It warned that if the university authorities failed to reverse the trend, the association would have no other choice than to embark on a mass protest nationwide.

Also, the Academic Staff Union of Nigerians Universities

Reasons for Increment of Universities Fees in Nigeria

Okoli, (2015) submitted that the federal government has made it mandatory for universities to find avenues for generating funds internally. Fees increase is driven by this mandate. Moreover, fees increase is also driven by the forces of globalisation. This position of the government has led to an increment in fees across tertiary institutions, especially public universities. There are many reasons for the increment in the fees of Nigerian universities and some of the reasons include; an increment in the cost of administration, low subvention from the government and poor internally generated revenue.

Increment in Cost of Universities administration: Due to the high inflation rate in the country and the high cost of energy, many tertiary institutions and universities in Nigeria have decided to increase the fees of the various institutions to increase the internally generated revenue. It has been observed that tuition fees are one of the major sources of revenue for universities globally. These costs have increased the cost of running the universities in Nigeria. Punch (2023a) submitted that at the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, the institution noted that it revised the charges payable by students due to the escalating cost of providing services. The increment was announced in a circular issued on December 20, 2022, which was addressed to all students of the institution. Punch (2023a) also submitted that **the** University of Maiduguri released a memo, which read that “Following the rising costs of teaching and learning materials as well as laboratory consumables and reagents brought about by market forces, the university Governing Council had at its 157th meeting held on Thursday, 1st of December, 2022 approved the review of registration charges for both postgraduate and undergraduate programmes

Low subvention from the Government: Low subvention from both the federal government and state government for the running of public universities has also led to an increment in university fees in Nigeria. In Nigeria, public universities got almost 90% of their funding from various governments. This funding which includes subvention is meant for both capital and recurrent expenditures. Recently, the Nigerian government has failed to increase the budgetary allocation of the various universities and these universities are expanding yearly (Ogunode & Ndayebom (2022); Ogunode, Akinjobi, & Olatunde-Aiyedun, (2022). Punch (2023) and Ogunode (2022) observed that a good number of public varsities in Nigeria have resorted to increasing school fees and other charges as a means to generate more revenue for the running of the universities.

Poor Internally Generated Revenue: The internally generated revenue of public higher institutions in Nigeria is small and contributes a small percentage to the total funding of the various institutions in the country (Ogunode, Abubakar & Ajape2021). Okani, Ogunode & Ajape (2021) observed that the poor internally generated revenue of the universities in Nigeria is a fundamental reason for a shortage of funds in the universities across the country. Majorities of public universities in Nigeria were designed and structured to depend fully on government subvention. So, universities cannot function without government funding.

Investigation revealed that many researchers and experts in higher education administration and management have asked the government to direct various universities in the country to increase their fees. They argued that fees paid by students in higher institutions, especially the universities are low and this is one of the major problems responsible for the poor internally generated revenue in most universities across the country. For instance, Ghanaian universities, South African universities, as well as universities in the United States of America and United Kingdom are all charging high fees compared to what Nigerian universities are charging.

Adio, (2022) argued that the zero tuition or paltry tuition policy in our public universities must have emanated from a good place and must have been appropriate at a time when we had just a few universities and undergraduates and people needed to be persuaded to go to universities. The context has changed. Based on current realities, the zero-tuition argument is no longer tenable. Introducing tuition at a low rate, increasing it over time and capping even the peak at a rate much lower than the fees charged by private universities will be a way to go. If we stick to UNILAG, tuition of N100,000 per annum (or N50,000 per semester) allows the school to generate an extra N4.5 billion per annum. This not only turns the students into real financial stakeholders in their education but also increases their agency as accountability actors in the university system. That N4.5 billion alone will reduce by 35% the funding gap between the government's subsidy (the N14 billion budgetary allocation) and the N27 billion UNILAG needs to fully deliver its obligations for training students for the year. If the school decides to bridge the entire gap solely from students' co-payments, the tuition will come to N288,888 per student per annum.

On the way forward, Ogunode, Johnson, & Olatunde-Aiyedun, (2022); Ogunode, Ugochukwu, & Iroegbu,(2022); Olowonefa, Ogunode, & Ohibime (2022) and Adio, (2022) observed that government can subsidize higher education and the thing to do is to allow those who can pay to pay for themselves and those who cannot pay have opportunity to access work-study programmes, need-based scholarships and concessionary loans. A disservice is done to all, especially the poor who have limited options when we do not have a properly funded public education system.

Globally, tertiary institutions do not depend wholly on tuition fees as their major sources of revenue. Adio, (2022) observed that universities can also generate considerable money from other sources such as grants, consultancies, business ventures, returns on investments, and especially from their alumni. Support from alumni is an area where many of our universities are leaving a lot of money on the table. Universities in the West keep a close table on the alumni, provide continuous value to them, and constantly ask them to pitch in. Our institutions are so glued to federal allocations that they not only ignore their alumni but even make them go

through excruciating pains for something as basic as transcripts, which can be a money spinner and which you can get on the day of graduation from properly administered schools.

There are many facts to show that Nigerians are patronizing public universities because it is affordable for them. According to Statista, 1, 854, 261 students enrolled in full-time undergraduate programmes in Nigeria's 170 universities in 2019, out of this number, 1, 206, 825 enrolled in 43 federal universities; 544, 936, in 48 state universities; and 102, 500, in 79 private universities. This means that despite constituting 46% of the universities in Nigeria, private universities had only about 6% of the total undergraduate student population in Nigeria in 2019; while state universities with 28% of total universities had 29% of the undergraduate student population; and federal universities with 25% of total universities had 65% of the undergraduate student population (Thisday, 2022). Combined, the public universities (state and federal) had 94% of the undergraduate student population in Nigeria in 2019. This indicated that majorities of Nigerian are patronizing public universities because it is affordable.

It is clear that the public universities in Nigeria are underfunded, and it is also understandable that fees charged by Nigerian tertiary universities are very low compared to other developing and developed countries. It is also obvious that Nigerian universities need to increase their fees. However, the methodology and process of fee increment are too fast and poorly implemented. There is no sensitization on the part of the government and university administrators on fees hike, no consultation with various students' unions and parents' representation on the percentage of fees increment and modalities.

Social Implications of University Fees Hike in Nigeria

There are many social implications of fee increment on the students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Some of the social implications include; a reduction in university enrolment, retention and graduate output, an increment in prostitution among female students, an increment in criminal activities, insecurity problems and human capital development.

Reduction Universities Enrolment, Retention and Graduate Output

The recent increment in the tertiary institutions' fees especially the public universities across Nigeria may lead to a reduction in access to higher education in Nigeria. The population of Nigerians who had degrees in higher education and those presently in the university system is low. Statistic.com (2022) revealed that as of 2020, around 68 per cent of the young population in Nigeria had secondary education as their highest educational level. Moreover, some 17 percent had achieved the post-secondary level of education, while 15 percent had completed primary education. Presently there are about 2.3 million students in universities across the country out of over 208 million population which is a very low ratio compared to other countries with more of their students in the university system. The NUC boss, while saying access to universities remains a major problem in the country's education sector, said Nigeria has a little above two million students in the university system, adding that the figure represents about one percent of the country's population. (Thisday, 2022). The present regime of fee increments in public universities may likely affect the enrolment rate, retention rate and graduate output rate. Okoli, (2015) stated that fees increase has a damaging impact on both students and their programmes. For instance, the United Kingdom introduced fees increase in 2013 in her universities, and the increase led to a drop in enrolment of as many as 18,000 students. In Australia, eight top universities used increase in fees to down-size their students' enrolment. Thus fees increase led to increased drop-outs and loss of opportunity for education. Many self-sponsored students and those whose parents could not afford the fees dropped out of their programmes. With the current high inflation, high unemployment and high rate of poverty in Nigeria, public universities are now increasing their fees. This development may force many young Nigerians out of the university system. Okoli, (2015) observed that the steady decline in the amount of money ploughed into universities by governments has given rise to a steady decline in the quality of education and fees increase are driven by this decline. Fees increase is a serious hindrance to Education for All (EFA) in Nigeria.

Increment in Female Prostitution

The increment in the public university fees in Nigeria may lead many young girls in Nigerian universities into prostitution and other social vices because most girls in the various institutions sponsor themselves in the universities. When young girls who are struggling to pay the fees before when it was low are now expected to pay as much as double or even more than what she was paying before, the effects would be too much for such girls. The present increment may lead some of them to prostitution and school runs to raise money to pay. Obi (2015) submitted that one of the reasons why young ladies in higher institutions in Nigeria engage in prostitution is because of the high rate of higher school fees. Majorities of the ladies engage in these social vices as students do it to raise money and meet up with social and academic needs in their schools. Ogunode (2020b) argued that when school fees are high beyond the reach of parents and students, it may lead female students into prostitution and other social vices. Okoli, (2015) noted that students resort to vices to cope in the face of the fee increase. Many females engage in prostitution while males indulge in robbery. Students from weak backgrounds would not have the opportunity to attend classes because of these difficult situations.

Increment in Criminal Activities

The hike in the fees of public universities in Nigeria may likely lead young Nigerians into criminal activities. The Nigerian population is mostly dominated by youths from ages 15-35. If majorities of this age group are denied higher education, especially university education it will lead to high crime activities in the various parts of the country. Muhammed (2018) discovered that one of the major reasons young people are involved in criminal activities is idleness. Idleness would occur among the youth when majorities of them are denied higher education because of fees hike in the various institutions across the country. The increment in the fees of the universities could lead to high criminal activities in the country. Punch (2023) reported that the coalition of northern groups (CNG) observed that “breed of frustrated youth shall become uncontrollably open to all vulnerabilities, temptations, and influences that could ultimately lead to an increase in organized crimes, worsen the security situation and seal the fate of the North permanently. “The number of university graduates and productive segments of every society will inevitably drop drastically and the confidence, hope, and faith of the commoners in the entire schooling system would be lost with dire consequences.

Insecurity Problems

The problem of insecurity in Nigeria could be increased and get worsened by the recent development in tertiary institutions, especially the universities where fees are increased beyond the reach of many Nigerian parents and students. The tertiary education fees hike in Nigeria is coming when the country's economy is not so stable and friendly to many. The increment of fees in many tertiary institutions especially the universities could lead to insecurity challenges in the country. With this development, many young Nigerians may likely not apply for admission and may drop out and defer their education. This may lead to idleness which can also degenerate into joining armed groups like the Bok Haram and IPOB. Joining these groups may increase the insecurity challenges of the country. Musa (2017) identified idleness, poverty and unemployment as some causes of insecurity in Nigeria. Punch (2023) reported that the coalition of northern groups (CNG) expressed worry on the fact that "some insensitive and indifferent authorities of northern Nigerian universities" had already announced incredible increments in their tuition. Those in this category according to the group, are the University of Maiduguri, Federal University Dutse, and the Federal University Lafia. “As is the tradition of the CNG, we took time to understudy the situation and assess the inherent dangers the hike in tuition would pose to Nigerians and especially to the northern region which has been abandoned to the mercy of rampaging banditry and insurgency. “Specifically, the northern region is currently being held ransom by bandits that operate with ease and at will in all the seven states of the North-West taking total control of land borders, highways, forests, and in some cases railways and airports (Punch 2023). Also, leadership (2023) quoted National Association of Nigerian Students

(NANS) observing that the recent 200 percent increase in school fees by the Nigerian universities especially, in the North-East region is a threat to the ongoing peace-building process that may in return produce fresh and intellectual insurgents. Since the announcement of the new school fees rates by the University of Maiduguri, there has been apprehension by both students and parents over the state of education for the poor vis-a-vis the terrorists' ideology of 'Boko Haram' meaning western education is forbidden, as such ideology resulted to the over 12- year Boko Haram insurgency that witnessed mass abduction of students, killings and destruction of educational structures in Borno and other parts of Northeast. Leadership (2023) observed that some stakeholders feared that the hike in the school fees might force some of the students who are internally displaced persons (IDPs) and less privileged in society to drop out of school and make them willing tools in the hands of the terrorists who have lost so many fighters due to intensive military onslaught against them.

Poor Human Capacity Development

Poor or low space of human capacity development may occur as a result of the increment in the tertiary education fees in Nigeria, especially among the public universities. Human capacity development is tied to education. Education is a human right that should be provided to all human beings solely for the reasons of being human. It has been established that all forms of education beginning from basic education, junior secondary, and senior secondary school education to tertiary education are all contributing to the social, economic and technological development of a country. However, research has it that tertiary education especially university education contributes mostly. NOUN (2012) observed that the need for higher education is partly based on the fact that those with higher education qualifications have a better chance of securing a job in a tough market compared to those without higher education qualifications. Leadership (2023) quoted Sarki who stated that education empowers minds that can conceive good thoughts and ideas. Education enables individuals to analyze while making life decisions. It was pointed out that the top ten most literate nations in the world are at peace, while almost all of the top ten least literate nations in the world are in a state of either outright war or general insecurity. "From the foregoing, it is neither exaggeration nor understatement to say that the higher a nation attains education, the stronger the nation's security, hence, education contributes to the security of the nation,". Research has shown that tertiary education are contributing to the social, economic and technological development of the country. Higher education has also contributed to the living standard of the people because the higher qualifications one earns, the higher his or her wages or salaries. When the number of people earning university qualifications reduces, it will affect the earning size of the population. With the recent increment in the fees of public universities in Nigeria, stakeholders in education believed that this development may likely result in poor or slow space of human capital development in Nigeria which was put at 163rd. Nigeria, Africa's biggest economy, is ranked 163rd in the United Nations (UN) Human Development Index (HDI). Okoli, (2015) opined that fees increase and their attendant impact has serious implications for 21st-century education. Obanya (2014) noted that education in Africa came into the 21st century with the heaviest human development deficit burden. Many African countries belong to the "low human development" group of countries. Africa's heavy dependence on external economic powers has an implication.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The paper discussed the social implications of universities fees hikes in Nigeria. The paper submitted that Stakeholders in tertiary education especially the universities have made their position known on the fee hike in Nigerian universities. Stakeholders like the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) and the Academic Staff Union of Nigerians Universities have opposed the idea and advised the government not to increase the fees in the various universities. The paper also identified reasons given by some of the universities for the increment to include; increment in the cost of administration, low subvention from the government and poor internally generated revenue. The paper also identified a reduction in

universities enrolment, retention and graduate output, an increment in prostitution rate among female students, an increment in criminal activities, insecurity problems and poor human capital development as may likely be the social impact of the universities fees hike in Nigeria. The paper concluded that the suggestions of the government on fees increment to enable public universities to generate more revenue and to be able to contribute to the management of the various universities is a welcome idea. But increment in the fees of various universities without a social programme to reduce the impact on the poor masses is not the best to do right now. The federal and state government should launch bursary programmes and scholarship programmes for students in tertiary institutions across the country. Private institutions and religious organizations should be encouraged to commence scholarship programmes for students. The Nigerian government should do all in its power to adopt the UNESCO 15-20% benchmark for funding education instead of the current 9.6%. Universities should seek partnerships with Non-governmental Organisations in the nation.

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